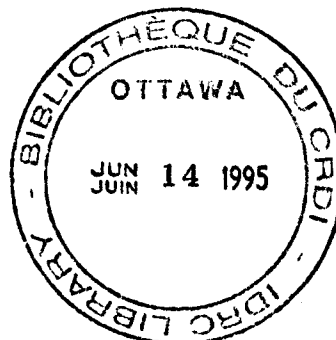


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RENEWING IDRC: AN ORGANIZATION FOR LEARNING

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I. INTRODUCTION

An organization that is not renewing itself: not actively seeking new challenges, nor setting for itself ever higher goals; not trying to tap more effectively the resources at its disposal, nor strengthening its capabilities; not improving its effectiveness by learning from its own experience; is an organization in decline. That process of renewal is essential, and it is underway within IDRC.

The President of IDRC requested that this paper be prepared as one contribution to that process of renewal: to provide a fresh overall perspective on what is being attempted and what needs to be done. This paper draws on experience and observations within the Centre over the last two years, and especially on suggestions made by Centre staff, recipients and others who have important relationships with IDRC. Responsibility for which ideas were selected, which emphasized, and for how they are expressed and inter-related, however, is mine alone. The judgements I have made in that regard have been shaped, in part, by my disciplinary field of speciality, Organizational Behaviour, and the growing literature on organizational learning; as well as by my own experience in dealing with organizational issues in the public sector over many years.

This report is not comprehensive, and does not, for example, deal to a significant degree with the renewal process as it affects administrative and support staff - more work on those questions needs to be done within the Centre. It also should be read in conjunction with the recommendations made over the last several months in the reports of the Centre's working groups.

IDRC operates in an increasingly turbulent environment, one characterized by rapidly evolving technologies; political and economic changes in the developing world which suddenly shift, expand or constrain the limits of the possible; a wide range of other donors whose activities require us with greater frequency to redefine the niche within which IDRC can make its best contribution; changes in the Canadian environment which pose new possibilities and dangers for the support IDRC can continue to expect to carry out its mission; the emergence and disappearance of organizations in the developing world capable of carrying out effective research for development; and so on. To deal effectively with that increasingly turbulent environment, IDRC needs to develop ways to respond more quickly and flexibly (while maintaining a necessary degree of continuity in its overall direction), to make better use of the capabilities of its staff and recipients in dealing with newly emerging opportunities and constraints, to enhance its own information processing capacity,

and generally to strengthen its capacity to anticipate, experiment and shift focus as we learn from our activities. The process of adapting ever more effectively to an increasingly turbulent environment is a continuing process of learning.

For IDRC, that learning process realistically cannot be limited within the formal boundaries of the organization, but must include our recipients and, to the degree possible, the potential users of the results of the research we support. Other important players in that learning process include other donors, the broader research community, and the relevant Canadian constituencies of IDRC. While this paper will not deal with this latter set of players, other work currently underway (including preparations for the 20th Anniversary of IDRC) should strengthen the involvement of other donors, the research community, and Canadians in the learning process that is, increasingly, IDRC.

Strengthening that learning process entails (as IDRC itself has demonstrated in some of its most successful endeavours) enhancing the ability of our staff and recipients to take responsibility, to innovate, experiment and learn. In other words, it is a process of empowering staff and recipients to act and to learn. That process of capacity or capability building has always been one of the greatest strengths of IDRC, and on that base the process of renewing IDRC can build. The basic decision is to invest in people, both staff and recipients: to find the right person, ensure they have the necessary resources, authority and context to do the job, and that the results of their efforts can be evaluated and fed back into the learning/decision-making process overall. That model needs to be further developed and strengthened in the process of renewing IDRC as an organization for learning.

The attributes of IDRC highlighted in the recent report of the Auditor General on well-performing organizations:

- Autonomy and flexibility at all levels;
- Strong client focus;
- Reliance on people;
- Leadership that empowers;
- Continual self-scrutiny;
- Organization that cares.

are all pre-conditions for the development of a learning organization. IDRC's success to date is rooted in that tradition. It is also reflected in the comments I have received from staff and others emphasizing that whatever the problems, frustrations and inadequacies individuals experience with IDRC, it remains far superior to most organizations with which it could be compared. At the same time growing concerns are expressed,

for example, about the capacity of IDRC to continue to attract and hold individuals of the highest calibre, and the extent to which the process of aging and bureaucratization that any organization tends to undergo is threatening just those qualities on which the future success of IDRC depends. So while recognizing the record of accomplishment and continuing success of IDRC, there is also a widely shared recognition of the need to renew the organization and strengthen its capacity to learn and to respond more quickly and more effectively to a turbulent environment.

A. Initiatives Already Underway

To foster that essential process of renewal, a number of important steps already have been taken. They include:

- Increasing use of longer term, broader based types of support (institutional and program support) that enhance recipients' abilities to adjust activities in response to lessons learned as the research process unfolds. Such a package of support for a research institution or research program can include measures to enhance the likelihood of utilization of research results, and should be designed (and judged by the extent to which it succeeds) in gradually strengthening the capacity of the recipients to do more for themselves;
- Decentralizing of spending authority, flattening of the hierarchy, beginning to clarify the role and authority of Regional Directors, and related steps designed to enhance the ability of staff at all levels to take responsibility, to innovate and learn;
- Increasing focus on policy and program issues at the Board level (e.g. through use of the divisional overview memoranda) in order to provide a context within which staff can exercise their increased authorities, to make clear the basis on which they would be held accountable, and generally to raise the level of discourse within the Centre;
- Defining explicitly the mission and objectives of the Centre (and further elaborating on those during the management ten-week seminar) to provide a further context, and to articulate a shared vision of what we are about to help focus and guide the initiatives to be taken by staff and recipients;
- Developing the use of Working Groups as a

participatory technique within the organization to bring the talents of staff to bear on a wide range of problems;

- Initiating experimental/learning approaches, involving a wide range of staff and some recipients, to develop and test innovative approaches to such issues as utilization of research results, regional development thrusts, women in development, and science and technology policy;
- Using seminars and related initiatives (including training/orientation) within and between divisions, in order to enhance the substantive dialogue and learning process within the Centre. Also enhancing communication generally through mechanisms like Echogramme, so that staff at all levels have a better sense of what is going on and are better able to contribute;
- Approving a policy allowing IDRC staff time off in order to refresh themselves professionally, and to provide the Centre with state-of-the-art statements and evaluations in their field of activity, leading to decisions about changes that should be considered in IDRC programming, and to IDRC advice to other donors and recipients in that regard. The time off provisions are part of designing a far better system for developing and managing our human resources;
- Steps underway to develop, improve and mesh the range of planning and evaluation instruments within the Centre and also to ensure an effective "central nervous system" to allow the decision-making/learning process of the Centre to operate more effectively. The key initiatives in this latter regard were the initial steps to establish a central secretariat for the Centre.

All of these steps have contributed to the process of renewal of IDRC as an organization for learning. The balance of this paper deals with suggestions of how to extend this process further.

B. Next Steps

In considering what next steps make sense to further develop IDRC as an organization for learning, the problem is not how to make such a learning or self-organizing process happen, for those processes cannot be forced and develop of their own

accord given sufficient opportunity. Rather the overriding question is how to allow staff and recipients to organize themselves to get the job done, how to remove impediments to that self-organizing, learning process and provide the necessary infrastructure, context, accountability system and support - the preconditions and space required for the process to occur. This paper will examine the next steps that might be considered to that end under three broad headings:

1. Decentralizing: Removing Structural Impediments to the Learning Process
2. Building an Environment and Infrastructure for Learning
3. Managing Human Resources: Treating People as Our Most Important Asset.

II. Decentralizing:* Removing Structural Impediments to the Learning Process

A guiding principle in developing an organization that learns and fosters learning, is that decision-making should be kept as close as possible to those who will be affected by those decisions - in the case of IDRC most often this means the decision-making should be kept as close as possible to the recipients. In practice only those decisions which clearly cannot be left to the recipient should be passed on to the Program Officer, and only those which the Program Officer clearly cannot address alone should be passed on to the Associate Director, and so on to the level of the Board.

The recipients too, can be encouraged to delegate a role in decision-making to potential users of the results of research being undertaken. We will need more experience in these efforts to see how far we can go, realistically, in the development of such a user-driven system for the work that IDRC supports; and also to see whether it would be feasible to take this process of decentralization one step further to the point of involving the ultimate beneficiaries (where they are not the user).

This decentralized model requires that each level in the system operate at a different level of generality, to provide a context and distinct value-added to work being done at the lower levels, rather than seeking to redo or second-guess that work. The intent is to enhance the ability of staff and recipients at all levels to take responsibility, to innovate, experiment and learn, by providing the structural room necessary for growth and development. It also seeks to ensure that broader contextual issues of policy and program receive the attention they require.

*Within the Centre, the term decentralization is used most often to describe steps to put more program staff into the regional offices, or to enhance the role of Regional Directors. This paper, while including those aspects as important elements, regards decentralization as necessarily a much broader process affecting all levels in the organization (including recipients). That broader approach, I think, is essential if a process of decentralization is to succeed.

The development of this more decentralized structure requires a review and clarification of the roles to be played by those at different levels, from recipients to the Board (and also conceivably extended to users and beneficiaries). Such a review can only, of course, be undertaken by Centre management and staff with Board approval; but the following pages outline a number of suggestions, arising from my own observations and discussions with Centre staff and others, of points that might be included in such a clarification of the roles and contributions to be expected of the different levels in a more decentralized IDRC system.

A. Role of Potential Users of Research Results

As we place increased emphasis on seeking to improve the likelihood that the results of the research supported by IDRC are used in the process of development, one general principle that has emerged, and is increasingly being applied, is the necessity of involving potential users as early as possible in the research process. This means that ideally those users should be involved beginning with the definition of the research objectives, and have an appropriate ongoing connection to the research process as it proceeds. As projects are considered for support by the Centre, we need to ask who those users are and the nature of their involvement in the proposed research. As we gain more experience with the best ways of involving users in this fashion, we may be able to develop further in the direction of a user-driven system. Determining how best to do that, and to identify and avoid the dangers inherent in such a development, needs to be an integral part of the IDRC learning process.

B. Role of Recipients

Building the institutional capacity to do useful research for development has always been a principal focus for IDRC, one where we have a comparative advantage vis-à-vis most other donors and a considerable record of success. We need to do more to learn from our own experience about what ways are the most effective to build that institutional capacity. Clearly an important element is the philosophy of responsiveness - leaving as much as possible of the decision-making and authorship for research activities with the recipient.

The next step in applying that philosophy may be to state explicitly a policy that we intend to decentralize to recipients more decision-making authority with respect to research activities as their capacity to take on that responsibility increases. This would imply moving gradually to longer term and broader based forms of research support centred on a research institution or a research program rather than on

individual research projects. Within the context of that broader package of support over a longer period of time, decisions on particular activities increasingly would be delegated to the recipients, with appropriate requirements for consultation with program staff. The current experiment with BAIF offers one model of how this might be done, and with experience simpler models to meet the same objectives could be evolved. If this policy were adopted, one of the criteria we would then apply to judging the success of our efforts would be the number of our recipients who have proven capable of taking on more and more responsibility for research activities, and decisions on providing support would be made with that objective in mind.

As part of a review of the role that recipients should play, it would be valuable to try to define (based on our experience to date) a series of stages which we would expect most organizations to go through, of increasing capacity (both administrative and substantive) to accept delegated authority and decision-making responsibility, and to provide these as guidelines to program staff. (In some cases, the institution or program might be located in a network of researchers rather than a single organization, and again our experience in building networks should be reviewed in that context and applied to developing such guidelines.) Program staff could then develop packages of support (for a project, program or institution) based on their current stage of development and with one objective being to further enhance those capabilities. Program staff would need to work closely with recipients in reaching those judgements. Already a similar model has been developed to guide the activities of the Fellowships and Awards Division, and that experience might help in developing such a policy for the Centre overall.

As they qualify for longer term and broader based types of support, recipients should be able to spend less time justifying and administering particular research projects. Instead, with broader program or institutional support, they would be able more easily to adjust research activities in light of lessons learned, and would have more time and support to reflect on and synthesize the results of their research, planning next steps in light of that review; and to include in the overall package of support initiatives intended to promote the dissemination and utilization of research results. As well, the relationship between Program staff and recipients could evolve away from one of donor-recipient, towards a more collegial relationship focussed on the shared interest in defining lessons learned and new activities to be undertaken to meet the broader objectives of the approved package of program or institutional support.

This more collegial relationship could be reinforced by providing increased means for recipients to feedback their views and results into IDRC's own internal policy development process (e.g. through participation in IDRC seminars and related activities, more frequent solicitation of their views in the development of new IDRC initiatives, and perhaps also through programs of personnel exchange and internship (for which clear conflict of interest rules would be required)).

C. Program Officers

Perhaps the key scarce resource in the Centre is the time of Program Officers. This becomes even more the case as the ratio of budget to Program staff continues to increase. If Program Officers are to be able to deal more quickly and effectively with a turbulent and rapidly changing environment, they need to be delegated as much decision-making authority as possible, within the context of an agreed and much clearer set of objectives and expectations of what they are to accomplish.

A quid pro quo for increased delegation of authority to make decisions, respond to changing circumstances and initiate experimental initiatives, is a prior definition of clear objectives to be pursued, and an effective system of accountability post facto for results achieved. Some divisions have instituted formal management by objectives systems, and a judgement should be made on whether that approach or some alternative would be appropriate for other parts of the Centre.

A further analysis also might be undertaken of the current use being made of Program Officers' time, with a view to eliminating or reducing those demands on that most valuable resource that are judged to be unproductive or of marginal value. It may be possible, for example, to reduce paperburden through a combination of further delegation of authority, simplification or reduction of reporting requirements, and better design and use of automated management information systems. All of these should be investigated. Program Officers, too, can be encouraged to explore possibilities for further reducing demands on their time through delegating more activities to recipients (for example, in the context of longer term and broader based support packages for research programs or institutions as discussed above), greater use of DAPS for project development, developing and making better use of the capabilities of support staff, and so forth. Some sort of recognition (prize or bonus) might be instituted for those who come up with the best suggestions of ways to reduce marginal or unproductive demands on the time of program staff.

The time made available for Program Officers in this fashion could be used by them, in part, to review and learn from past experience, to share those insights within the Centre and with recipients, other donors, and the broader research community, to develop a better understanding of the state-of-the-art in their field, to develop experimental activities to deal with emerging questions and advance that state-of-the-art, and to contribute to planning and strategy for future activities. All of these initiatives would recognize the status of Program staff as research professionals, and seek to develop and make far better use of their capabilities.

In that context as well, it might be valuable to clearly state that the Project Summary is the Program Officer's document, and that once the probationary and training period is over, it should be very exceptional for a Project Summary to be significantly changed or rewritten by supervisors at different levels in IDRC. Those supervisors would be expected to make changes only to the extent the proposal clearly was not consistent with established policies and priorities.

It also should be made clear that the delegation of greater authority to Program Officers is, in part, intended to give them greater scope to empower and respond to recipients and to that end, Program staff generally should be located as close as possible to recipients (in Regional Offices). As the Winegard Report has recognized, there are increased administrative costs to such a policy of location, but the benefits, while less easy to quantify, appear to be overriding. Indeed, in the context of the Winegard Report and the Government response, there may be an argument to consider a one-time increase in the PY level and budgetary allocation of the Centre in order to meet the objective of increased decentralization. Any such move would need to be carried out in a manner that did not have too negative an effect on the policy of maintaining a ratio of 70:30 in program to administrative expenditures. The current review of the method of calculating the 70:30 ratio should help to clarify how much of a limitation this will be in fact in furthering the objective of decentralization.

D. Associate Directors

What distinctive contribution should Associate Directors be expected to make as opposed to that of Program Officers on the one hand or Program Directors on the other? There would be a value in developing for all Associate Directors a clearer statement of the role they are expected to play, including their responsibility to:

- recruit and provide leadership to a team of highly qualified professionals;
- ensure disciplinary quality control on the work being done;
- integrate the demands and realities being communicated by recipients and Program Officers with the policies and priorities coming from the Board and Senior Management (and ensure the latter are clearly aware of the former);
- in the context of the foregoing, define Program priorities. This was described by one senior officer as a sort of "strike zone" so that Program staff know that so long as proposals are within that zone they are likely to proceed with very little challenge, but to the degree that they depart from that zone more questions are likely to be raised. The point is to ensure the minimal necessary consistency in the initiatives presented by individual program officers, so that lessons learned can be applied to focussing initiatives across the program (creating a whole that is more than the sum of its parts); and
- generally to empower Program staff and ensure they have the context and resources to do the job.

While the precise roles of Associate Directors will necessarily differ to some degree between divisions, there is still enough commonality in their responsibilities that there would be considerable benefit to be gained if a regular meeting of all Associate Directors were to be convened by the President to discuss issues of common concern. (That meeting might be held twice a year when AFNS Associate Directors were in Ottawa.) This also would allow for further development of a shared understanding of the role of Associate Directors and for exchanging experiences on ways that seem to be most successful in fulfilling that role. (Part of the meeting might be chaired by the President, and part might be held just amongst the ADs themselves with a rotating chairmanship.)

E. Deputy Directors

The role of the Deputy Director has been developed as essentially the alter ego to the Program Director. In addition to standing in for the Director in the latter's absence, the Deputy Director needs to have skills that complement those of the

Program Director - needs to have strength in the Program Director's areas of relative weakness.

The relative roles of the Deputy and Program Director therefore need to be defined clearly, in each case, in a manner that reflects their respective areas of strength and allows them to work together effectively as a team. In that way, the Deputy is delegated responsibilities (both programmatic and administrative) that otherwise would be fulfilled by the Program Director. Such an agreement defining areas of responsibility, perhaps should be set down in writing each time a new Deputy or Program Director is appointed, approved by the President or appropriate Vice President, and circulated for information within the division and to Centre Officers and Regional Directors. That agreement also would need to reflect the understanding that certain management and leadership responsibilities of Program Directors (discussed in the next section) are fundamental to their role, and cannot be delegated.

F. Program Directors

The role of the Program Directors appears to be the most clearly understood within the Centre. One point, however, that might deserve greater emphasis in a restatement of that role as part of the process of decentralization, is that Directors are not paid more than program staff because they are expected to be better program officers or scientists. The scientific capabilities and development research experience of Program Directors, their professional standing in the research community, are necessary but not sufficient qualifications for that office. Rather, Directors are paid more to compensate for the additional management responsibilities they assume and the management skills they must bring to the task.

In this context, it should be clear that Directors are evaluated on that basis, which is to say, on the basis of their ability to recruit the best people as Associate Directors, and ensure that there is in place the context (clear divisional direction and priorities), the style of operation, relations with the Board, Senior Management, other divisions and outside institutions, the resources and the intellectual leadership necessary to allow the AD's and their staff to develop excellent activities.

G. Vice-Presidents

The mandate and role of Vice-Presidents has recently been redefined. The Vice-Presidents are intended to act as deputies to the President in their areas of responsibility, taking on some of the tasks he otherwise would have to fulfill

himself. This means, in part, that as a rule the Vice-Presidents do not intervene in the internal management of divisions unless circumstances are exceptional, but focus instead on managing the context within which Directors manage their divisions. Principal instruments to do this are the committees that each Vice-President chairs.

In the case of the Personnel and Administrative Policy Committee, the Vice-President, Resources has indicated that its mission is to ensure that the administrative units operate to facilitate the work of the Centre and remove any unnecessary administrative impediments. This is the context in which he would expect the Committee to judge particular issues, and one of the bases on which he, in turn, will be evaluating the performance of the managers who report to him.

To help guide and organize its activities, the Program Committee needs to develop a shared understanding of what the key development issues are in the coming years and what contribution research in general, and IDRC in particular, can hope to make to their resolution. This should provide a substantive context for defining its work program, for making decisions and tradeoffs on particular program and project issues that come before it, and for deciding on the support and advice it will offer to the Program and Policy Committee of the Board.

In addition, the Vice-Presidents have a special role in ensuring, with the President, that the program and administrative sides of the Centre do not become isolated one from the other, but operate effectively together. An additional initiative that might facilitate this, would be to co-locate an officer from the administrative side (likely the Treasurer's Office) with the division(s) they are assigned to serve.

H. President

As Chief Executive Officer, the President is the key link between the Board and Centre staff and has a non-delegable responsibility for the Centre's relationship with the Minister and other key political players.

In addition, the President is the principal external spokesman for the Centre in dealings with the media, Canadian constituencies, foreign governments, CIDA, other donors, and research institutions. In this role he is assisted by the Vice-Presidents, other Centre Officers, Regional Directors and other staff. As demands in these areas increase, in particular with respect to dealing with Canadian constituencies, there likely will need to be a broader and more coordinated sharing of this responsibility within the Centre.

Through the President's Committee he is responsible for managing the overall strategic direction of the Centre and the framework for allocations to particular activities in that context. In a sense the President is responsible for managing the overall boundaries of the organization: ensuring there is sufficient independence, resources, calibre of staff, shared sense of mission, and leadership for the Centre to organize itself and continue to develop ever more effective ways to carry out its mandate.

I. Board of Governors

The changes made by the Board of Governors to its own operations at the beginning of this year, in particular increasing the level of delegated authority to Centre staff and beginning to refocus its own deliberations more towards policy and program issues (e.g. through the use of the new overview memoranda), created the space and the opportunity for the further decentralization discussed in this paper. While maintaining its essential right and ability to intervene on any project, the Board has clearly shifted its focus to policy and program issues, and in the coming months it will be important to further develop the quality of the overview memoranda and other documentation and support required by the Board to focus more effectively on those issues.

Given the reduction in the number of projects requiring specific Board approval, and the intent that increasingly projects should be considered in the context of program and policy questions, the Board may want to give serious consideration over time to merging the responsibilities of the Screening and the Policy and Program committees.

As Centre staff, in particular Program Officers, are delegated additional authority and responsibility, it will be all the more important that they understand fully the intentions and concerns of the Board, and to that end steps should be considered to allow Program Officers easier access to Board meetings--either to be able to attend the meeting itself, or else to receive (video?) tapes or other forms of reporting that communicate the spirit as well as the substance of what was said.

As part of the process of clarifying the contributions made by the various levels in the IDRC organization, it would be very useful to have a statement, approved by the Board, elaborating its particular role.

J. Regional Directors

The role of the Regional Director does not lie within the decision-making hierarchy that has been outlined over the preceeding pages, but rather cross-cuts it. This has always made it difficult to define a role for Regional Directors that both makes the best use of their capacities and the potential of their office, and also relates their contribution effectively to the activities of those within the program decision-making structure. Once, however, a process of decentralizing has been undertaken, and in particular, once there are more Program Officers located in Regional Offices with enhanced authority (and with Program Officers from different divisions ideally having a more comparable degree of authority), there should be a much better opportunity to clarify, strengthen and integrate the role that should be played by Regional Directors in the Centre's decision-making process.

An initial step would be to define what might be termed the area of comparative advantage of Regional Directors-what are those areas of responsibility, not now being effectively carried out, where Regional Directors would be in a better position to fill the gap than Program Directors? Within those areas, the RDs would be authorized to use Regional Office Funds to support activities, and would be able to call upon the assistance of program staff in the Regional Office in some specified way. A number of steps in this direction are already under consideration or being tried:

- the terms of reference of the Regional Office Fund are being clarified and the establishment of committees of Program staff in the Regional Office to suggest and help coordinate allocations from that fund (on the model of the operation in SARO) is being considered;
- RDs are working with Program staff to define regional development thrusts and to catalyze inter-divisional activities with a regional focus;
- RDs increasingly are involved in experimental activities designed to foster the utilization of research results (for example, the LARO work with UNAM (Mexico) to examine the marketing of technology arising from Centre-funded research). Again, Regional Office Funds are being used and RDs are being advised and assisted by Program staff;
- RDs are playing an increasing role in program evaluations and post-project review, working with

OPE and program staff and often using regional expertise;

- Arrangements are being made for Regional Directors to be able to apply their signing authority to authorize expenditures by Program Officers from divisional budgets so long as these are in accord with terms and conditions to be specified by Program Directors;
- Consideration is being given to allocating a percentage of divisional budgets to multi-disciplinary projects to be developed in the region by divisional Program Officers working with the RD;
- The improved E-Mail system is being used to allow RDs to review and comment on issues being considered by Senior Management in Ottawa, and other measures are being considered to enhance the role and contribution of RDs to the Centre's planning process (for example, the possibility of RD's contributing a brief overview memorandum to the Board each quarter to complement that provided by Program Directors);
- RD's are being given a role in the performance appraisals of program staff in their regional office and measures are being considered to strengthen that role and also give RD's a stronger say in the posting of Program staff.

All of these initiatives are in addition to the ongoing responsibilities of RDs to administer the Regional Office, provide necessary infrastructure for Program Officers working there, play a key representational role to governments and institutions in the region, and advise the Centre on the development strategy, priorities and general situation of countries in that region. In this latter regard, they can help to identify countries in which there is an emerging opportunity for Centre support. These and related initiatives, which are beginning to define the areas of comparative advantage of RDs, might now be reviewed to produce a clearer statement of the role of RD's, and of the resources and staff support they need to carry out that role. That statement would need to reflect the ongoing, primary line of decision-making through the program structure of the Centre, and would define a role for the RD's in filling in gaps where they clearly have a comparative advantage to do so.

As the role of RDs is clarified and their contribution enhanced, it will be important that a Centre Officer or Officers be mandated to ensure that the views of RDs are canvassed and brought to bear on Centre decision-making in a timely way, that the RDs are kept advised of developments in the Centre's decision-making process, and that improved facilities are in place for RDs to consult, share experience, and coordinate amongst themselves. Initially, this responsibility might be assigned to the Vice-Presidents and the Secretary, with support from the Secretariat and the office of the President (to whom the RDs would continue to report). Depending on the effectiveness of this arrangement, additional measures to ensure stronger links between RDs and the decision-making process at headquarters may need to be considered in the future.

K. A Concluding Note on Decentralization

The foregoing pages outline some steps that can be taken to further the process of decentralization within IDRC. To make this happen, Centre Management and staff will need to undertake a much more systematic effort to define the appropriate level of focus of each level in the organization, one which delegates as much decision-making authority as possible to those closest to the action, and which clarifies the distinctive contribution or value-added expected from each successive level in the organization. Recipients, and, to the degree possible, potential users of research results and beneficiaries, need to be considered as integral parts of such an organization for learning. The results of such a review might be presented to the Board at the end of the current 18 month experiment in decentralization, along with recommendations for the levels of delegation and the associated responsibilities and authorities for each level in the organization that should apply following the end of the current trial period.

The intent is to have an organization that provides the necessary structural room for recipients and staff at all levels to take responsibility, to innovate, experiment and learn, thereby tapping and developing a far greater range of their capacities, and enhancing the repertoire and flexibility of IDRC for dealing effectively with a rapidly changing and turbulent environment.

III. Building an Environment and Infrastructure for Learning

With the structural impediments reduced or removed, staff and recipients at all levels will have increased room in which to experiment, take initiatives and learn. But if the learning process that is IDRC is to be cumulative and productive, if the whole is to be more than the sum of its parts, and if we are to realize the maximum benefit from the freeing of energy and potential that the process of decentralization should produce, a number of additional steps will need to be taken. In particular, we will need to build a shared context and framework of policy and priorities to provide guidance to staff and recipients in exercising their increased authority to innovate and take initiatives; we will need to develop and encourage an action-learning operating style, one that fosters a greater degree of experimentation and risk taking, and in which the results of those initiatives are evaluated and effectively fed back into the process of planning to create a self-correcting process of learning; we will need to develop better mechanisms to focus the learning process on specific problems and issues, marshalling talent, resources and creativity; and we will need to provide the necessary support infrastructure - staff support, communication links, documentation and other mechanisms - the minimum necessary underpinnings that an effective learning process requires. We will deal with each of these matters in turn in the next part of this paper.

A. Building a Shared Vision and Context for Learning

As staff and recipients take on increasing responsibility for the activities of the Centre, it becomes more important that in considering and carrying out such initiatives they operate from a shared understanding of what we are about and what the Centre wishes to accomplish. That shared vision and the process of defining and updating it, provides the essential context within which decisions on more particular undertakings can be made throughout the organization. In a turbulent environment, such a shared vision and framework for action provide relatively stable points of reference, a compass to use in dealing with rapidly changing circumstances

Significant steps have been taken recently toward defining and putting in place mechanisms to update and disseminate such a vision and framework for action: including, in particular, the introduction of planning mechanisms such as the PPR and IDDR, and more recently the divisional overview memoranda; the attempt to define a mission statement and

objectives for the Centre overall; and the Board's decision to focus its activities more on policy and program issues - that is to focus more on managing the context within which particular initiatives and the learning process of the Centre overall can be undertaken.

Many of the planning and evaluation instruments, however, have been introduced at different times to meet somewhat different objectives, and there is a need to review these to streamline the process, remove duplication, ensure that the distinct function of the various instruments is clear and mutually reinforcing, that their relative timing makes sense, and that as a whole they constitute an effective system for the overall governance of the Centre. Reviews currently are underway to that end.

Such a review will need to clarify the relative role and consequent focus, procedures and timing for the various planning and evaluation instruments. In particular, it will be important to reinforce and upgrade the role of the Program and Policy Review (PPR) as the principal strategic, context-setting document for the Centre, and to elaborate a more systematic process for its preparation. Then the roles of other planning and evaluation instruments can be reviewed and redefined to support the PPR and the overall strategic planning/learning process.

For example, the In Depth Divisional Review (IDDR) could be defined as a review and evaluation of the extent to which a particular division has succeeded in pursuing the strategic directions outlined in the PPR, and what changes in those directions are indicated as a result of the lessons learned. The divisional focus of the IDDR clearly should be subordinate and contribute to the Centre-wide focus of the PPR, and the provision of stronger staff support (coordinated through OPE) and the establishment of clearer procedures for the IDDR, should be considered to ensure those exercises can be integrated more effectively within the overall planning process of the Centre. The Program of Work and Budget (PWB) might be seen as the annual elaboration of the more particular initiatives that the Centre and its divisions are planning to undertake to achieve the objectives and priorities outlined in the PPR. The new divisional overview memoranda are quarterly updates of the steps divisions are taking in line with the PWB, and will flag policy issues emerging on which the Board will need to give further direction.

The role of the Regional Directors in contributing to each of these documents, too, will need to be clarified, and within their areas of comparative advantage (as discussed above),

the views of RDs should be canvassed and incorporated into the planning process. That review of planning and evaluation instruments also could identify gaps in the current system. (For example, it has been suggested that processes similar to the IDDR should be considered to review thematic areas of activity that cut across divisional boundaries, or to review Regional Offices.)

The current review of planning and evaluation instruments should result in a system for the overall governance of the Centre which is more coherent, lighter and more transparent - one that allows for greater contributions by staff and recipients to the development of the overall strategy, direction and vision of the Centre, and one which provides them with clear guidance and a clear context within which to exercise their increased authorities in a more decentralized operation.

As the key strategic instrument, the PPR should be the result of a more systematic scanning of the environment, focussing on changing political and economic circumstances, emerging development issues, technological change, and all of the other matters which make the environment in which IDRC operates turbulent, and which require an increased capacity for rapid response and more effective learning. Leading figures in development should be consulted regularly, as should staff and recipients and others with a valuable perspective to bring to bear on these questions. The Board should be kept aware of the results of these scans of the environment in which IDRC operates, and those results should be brought together annually in the PPR process.

In the context of that understanding of the environment, key issues can be raised for Board decision; for example, regional concentration, new areas of activity, policy on matters such as human rights, and what shifts in direction seem required in light of lessons learned from past initiatives. In this latter regard, evaluation efforts, at all levels, would need to be keyed ever more closely to feeding the ongoing planning and learning process.

It would be particularly important to ensure effective participation by staff in this strategic direction setting process, given both the range of experience and knowledge they can contribute, and the fact that it is they, through the initiatives they take, who give reality to that direction. To do so, they require both a very clear understanding of the intent and objectives of the Centre, and a continuing substantial sense of authorship for what the Centre is trying to achieve.

Conversely, to the extent these broader objectives are not clearly understood, widely shared, and kept to the fore in deciding on particular initiatives, the result is likely to be the classic bureaucratic syndrome of displacement of goals, where subordinate operational objectives or much narrower goals become ultimate ends in themselves. To help avoid this, additional initiatives should be experimented with to allow for broader staff participation in the definition and updating of the overall vision and strategic direction of the Centre. For example, in the last few years CIDA has operated a futures orientation program for their staff, one that involved staff members from various parts of the organization coming together for a couple of days to review their understanding of the environment in which the organization operates, define the kind of contribution that the organization might make to fulfilling the needs identified in that context, and redefine the particular sorts of activities and initiatives they might undertake in their particular organizational roles to that end. Some version of this sort of exercise might be adapted to the realities of IDRC, and results of those discussions fed back into the strategic planning and learning process of the Centre.

In this context, it also will be important (as was noted above in the discussion of the role of the Board of Governors) that staff be given a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of the tenor of discussions and the concerns and interests expressed in meetings of the Board and Centre Management. This should provide staff at all levels with additional guidance and a clearer context in which to exercise their delegated authority.

B. Fostering a Culture and Environment for Learning

The culture of an organization for learning needs to be significantly different from that of a bureaucracy. The best of a learning process can only be blueprinted to a certain degree, and needs a substantial openness to entrepreneurial, real time activities driven by available skills and opportunities. We need an experimental, risk taking culture in the context of the shared IDRC vision; one that is designed with appropriate accountability, feedback and evaluation mechanisms to become a self-steering, learning process. A number of steps have been taken and more can be done to strengthen such a culture within IDRC.

A basic operating style needs to be reinforced of delegating to staff and recipients at all levels as much authority as possible within a context of agreed objectives, of minimizing the degree to which the initiatives of those staff and recipients require prior approval by other levels in the

organization, but instead having a stronger process of accountability and evaluation of lessons learned after the fact, in order to inform future decision-making and to assess performance. The Board has set an example in this regard with recent decisions to delegate more day-to-day decision-making to staff and to focus more attention on policy and program questions, setting objectives and evaluating results. Such an approach already is followed as well in many parts of the Centre, but some divisions do this better and more consistently than others.

The key in moving in this direction is to strengthen further the accountability process, devoting more time and effort to reviewing the results of our work and feeding those assessments back into the planning process. Such feedback, and the ability to shift activities and set higher goals as a result, is fundamental to any learning process. At present there is sometimes too little awareness of what has been accomplished and what is being tried on an experimental basis within the Centre, so that our learning process is less effective than it could be.

The current plan to allow Program Officers to take time off to review and evaluate the results of an area of research they have been supporting, should help to strengthen the feedback we require on the results of initiatives. But it will be even more important to establish a clearer audience and demand within the decision-making process for such reviews of results. For example, some sessions of the Program Committee, and possibly also part of a Board meeting, might be set aside to review selected groups of Project Completion Reports (PCR) (whose format and quality for that purpose will need to be improved further), and other more formal evaluations of programs or groups of projects. The existence of such a forum would send a clear signal that reviews of results and preparation of PCRs and evaluations need to be given more attention; and that the assessment of the performance of staff would, at least in part, reflect their contribution to that process as well as their role in project development. A further step to reinforce such an evolution, might be to give greater emphasis in the IDRC annual report to lessons learned and results achieved. It is unlikely that we will see much improvement in the attention paid to, or the timeliness and usefulness of, evaluations and PCRs, unless they are more effectively integrated into the overall learning and planning process of the Centre, and a clear value is attributed to contributions staff make in that regard.

A related requirement is a willingness to embrace error and an understanding that mistakes are an essential part of any learning process, and all the moreso in the kind of turbulent and unpredictable environment in which IDRC operates. If we do

not take risks and accept the likelihood and value of mistakes that necessarily occur in that process, our ability to innovate and be at the leading edge of research for development, will be all the poorer. There may be a value, for example, in instituting a prize or some other form of recognition for those new initiatives undertaken from which the most was learned. In many cases, those initiatives may not, in themselves, have been successes, but their value would be in the lessons learned which will contribute to future success. In addition, some specified portion of program budgets might be designated for use in particularly high risk, experimental initiatives; and the results of those initiatives, too, evaluated in terms of lessons learned as well as the extent to which particular research objectives were achieved.

Another approach that has been tried recently to foster experimentation and a learning culture was the request made to staff by the President to suggest experimental initiatives to enhance the likelihood of the utilization of research results. A wide range of proposals were put forward by Centre Officers and Regional Directors following consultation with staff, and many such experiments are underway. These experiments now need to be followed up, the results and their implications for what changes might be made in the Centre's approach discussed and decided upon, and new experiments or initiatives considered in that context. By, in a sense, "closing the loop" in this way, we can build a more effective, cumulative learning process around the issue of utilization. Such a learning model also might be applied to other areas of concern.

The development of a climate and culture for learning requires an environment which is rich in information and communication, one that provides the space and opportunity for those involved to discuss and compare notes on efforts being undertaken and lessons learned. Again, some valuable steps have been taken within the Centre to create such a space and climate. The reconstitution of Echo and the establishment of Echogramme to provide better internal communication have been valuable steps, and the process of office automation offers possibilities for further improvement.

The institution of the IDRC seminar series also has made a contribution. It would be valuable to look at ways to make these seminars more cumulative (for example organizing a subset of several seminars within the series around the same general topic), and also to improve the way in which the results of seminars might be fed back into the learning/planning process of the Centre, and perhaps also communicated to wider audiences when appropriate. Such seminars also offer opportunities to draw Canadian researchers and those from the developing world more

closely into the discussions within the Centre, and thereby enhance our mutual understanding of the state-of-the-art in various fields, and what further needs to be done. That dimension of the seminar series, too, might be strengthened.

Opportunities for more informal contact within the Centre also should be encouraged, and the establishment of the staff lounge has been a help in this regard. The Working Group on Communications has made many worthwhile recommendations, most of which are now being implemented, to further improve the formal and informal communication links within the Centre, and thereby help to enhance the environment and culture for learning.

C. Focussing the Learning Process

It has become commonplace to point out that development issues and problems do not correspond precisely to disciplinary boundaries. Within IDRC, increasing attention has been paid to finding ways to encourage inter-divisional and inter-disciplinary activities that are problem oriented. The objective has not been, and should not be, inter-divisional activities for their own sake, but rather to reduce the extent to which divisional or disciplinary boundaries are impediments to bringing together all relevant skills to focus on particular issues and problems.

For some years now we have been experimenting with different ways of doing this and it may be time to make that process of experimentation more explicit and self-conscious. For example, Working Groups have been established to pull together skills from across the organization to develop coordinated approaches to particular substantive issues such as nutrition and AIDS. Other Working Groups have been established to deal similarly with a wide range of management issues.

Another example, which moves beyond the essentially advisory and policy recommendation role of working groups, and entails the assignment of some administrative responsibilities, are the so-called Centre-wide units such as Women in Development and the experiment with BAIF on integrated support to research institutions. Similar Centre-wide units or activities may be established in such areas as Science and Technology Policy and in the field of Governance (Public Policy and Participation). One additional area I would suggest be considered as a candidate for the establishment of a Centre wide, coordinated activity or unit is the utilization of research results, where a stronger mechanism is required to focus the experiments and learning process now underway. (It may be that a Centre-wide unit on Science and Technology Policy could be mandated specifically to assume this role as well.) Other examples of ways we are trying to focus

activities across divisions or disciplines on particular issues are the efforts to institute particular regional development thrusts, and the parallel AFNS initiatives to promote coordinated inter-divisional activities in the regions.

In all of these initiatives we appear to be in the process of developing a shorter-term problem or issue oriented structure to overlay on the longer-term divisional or disciplinary organization of the Centre. That disciplinary structure represents the long term strength and comparative advantage of the Centre and it is likely to remain so and to evolve or change relatively slowly. In the turbulent, rapidly changing environment we face, however, it is increasingly important to develop ways to be able to restructure more quickly to focus resources across divisions on particular issues or problems for a period of time; and to integrate more effectively that emerging capacity for temporary, problem-focussed restructuring, with the longer term divisional organization of the Centre.

To that end, Management might review the various problem or issue-oriented approaches that already are being tried or considered. The object of that review would be to ensure in a systematic way that each such activity now underway or to be undertaken is given a specific charter which includes a definition of:

- its focus and objectives;
- the budget to be allocated to it;
- the people to be assigned to undertake it and the extent of their involvement relative to any other responsibilities they carry (those individuals in some cases may need to be supplemented by contract or term employees);
- a clear time frame for the undertaking (recognizing that the problem-oriented structure should be conceived essentially as a temporary organization to deal with particular issues);
- mechanisms for cross divisional consultation;
- the process for reviewing results and evaluating success as the initiative proceeds; and
- the reporting lines (to a Centre Officer or committee of Centre Officers) for the individual designated to head the activity.

The number of these activities should not be large, and only areas of activity that are regarded as a Centre priority, requiring considerable inter-divisional collaboration, and which cannot be handled using simpler inter-divisional consultative mechanisms, should be considered for such a special charter. We will need to learn from current and future experiments which approaches to focussing resources and attention on issues seem to be most successful in which circumstances, and use these lessons in further clarifying the charters for such activities (working groups, Centre-wide units, regional thrusts and so on) in future. At the end of the period of its Charter, the issue-oriented activity might be wound up, or renewed and perhaps refocussed, or relocated within the ongoing divisional structure of the Centre.

A special assignment to coordinate such an activity could be given to staff at any level, although the time requirements for any such assignment would need to be clearly specified and conflicting time demands reduced. Consideration also should be given to special pay for those coordinators lasting for the duration of the assignment.

The Centre reserve increasingly can be used to fund those initiatives, at least in part, and consideration might be given to develop in parallel a central pool of PY's, which similarly can be allocated to divisions or to issue-oriented activities, giving the Centre important additional flexibility to shift focus to deal with unexpected, high priority demands.

D. Strengthening the Infrastructure and Staff Support for the Learning Process

For a decentralized learning process to operate successfully, requires at the least:

- a very effective system of internal communication, so that people in one part of the organization can find out in a timely fashion about relevant initiatives being undertaken elsewhere;
- a strong institutional memory so that we really can learn from experience in a cumulative way; and
- support for decision-making that ensures issues are addressed at the appropriate (i.e. lowest feasible) level within the organization, that those at the table have the resources, authority and information necessary to make decisions, that the decision to be made is clear and discussions can be focussed to that end, and that once the decision is made, it is effectively disseminated and followed up.

The recent establishment of a central secretariat (and the clearer differentiation of the secretariat function from that of the General Counsel) was an important step toward providing those necessary support functions and infrastructure. The Secretariat already is serving as a focal point to which people at all levels in the organization can turn to clarify what decisions have been made, what is or is not Centre policy, what questions are being addressed and where within the organization, or to suggest new questions that need to be so addressed. The Secretariat will need to continue to strengthen its capacity to do all of this, to reduce the (often inadvertent!) secrecy and associated rumours within the Centre, and to provide ever more effective dissemination of the results of Board and Management meetings. The Secretariat also has recently taken on responsibility to help in the dissemination of the results of the IDRC seminar series, which seems a natural extension of its role in providing basic support to the learning process within the Centre overall. The emerging philosophy of the Secretariat is one of providing service to both Centre staff and the various Board and Management committees it supports, and this service orientation is fundamental to its credibility and effectiveness.

An area which will require particular attention in the coming months is improving support to Centre decision-making. There is a need, expressed widely within the Centre, for tighter, more focussed decision-making meetings. To that end, the Secretariat can be encouraged to play a more assertive role in ensuring that documentation brought before such decision-making bodies is as brief and to the point as possible, clearly specifying decisions required and containing all of the information and considerations necessary to provide a basis for such decisions. Documents that do not meet those requirements should be sent back for reworking. The Secretariat also can support the Chairman to ensure that no item is placed on an agenda that can be dealt with more informally or at a lower level in the organization, that all those relevant to the decision are present at the meeting, and that the discussion is structured and focussed on decisions required. In addition, the Secretariat is responsible for providing the institutional memory on what has been discussed and decided, so that deliberations can be undertaken with an understanding of that history and context. As well, it ensures that decisions are effectively disseminated, and that the Chairman is kept advised of what actions have been taken as a result. The Secretariat can strengthen further its ability to assist the Chairmen in reducing the number of committee meetings, and in coordinating the work of the various committees. Above all, the number of committees or sub-committees created needs to be kept to an absolute minimum, and the Secretariat should be encouraged to provide ongoing advice to the Chairmen, and in particular to the President, to

that end. The success of these measures will depend, to a large degree, on the working relationship between the Chairman and the Secretary of the committee -- the Chairman needs to have confidence in and rely on the advice of the Secretary, and the Secretary needs to understand and faithfully communicate and carry out the objectives and wishes of the Chairman.

The decision-making process of the Centre requires not only the process support provided by the Secretariat, but also substantive support. The Chairman should be briefed on the substance of proposals before the Committee, how they relate to other proposals or issues pending and to the overall priorities of the Committee, the likely positions that various members of the Committee will take, the alternatives for resolving outstanding disputes, and so on. The Chairman also requires substantive support in defining the work program for the Committee and the strategic framework on the basis of which particular questions will be selected for consideration, and choices and tradeoffs made on particular matters. Finally, the Chairman will require support in pulling together relevant resources across the Centre to undertake analysis and information gathering necessary for decision-making on some issues.

The Centre unit which has the mandate and capability to provide this substantive support is the Office of Planning and Evaluation, and it should be tasked to make the provision of that support its first priority. In this role, OPE would need to work very closely with the Secretariat, and over time they should come to operate, *de facto* if not *de jure*, as a single unit. In practice it is difficult to separate process and substance and this reality will need to be reflected in the arrangements to provide support and the necessary infrastructure for the Centre's learning and decision-making process. If OPE does not come increasingly to play this sort of role, other more *ad hoc* arrangements are likely to be developed to fill the gap.

One of the implications of OPE taking on such a role is that it will need to adopt more of the service orientation of the Secretariat, focussing on providing substantive support to the various decision-making bodies within the Centre. Increasingly, its agenda will need to reflect the agenda for decision-making within the Centre overall, and in carrying out its responsibilities it will need to be in close touch with, and responsive to, the views and concerns of Centre management and staff in Ottawa and the Regional Offices, as well as the developments in the salient environment of IDRC. To better support the planning and decision-making process, it will need to canvass and draw on the expertise and experience that exists throughout the Centre (and amongst recipients) in a more systematic way.

OPE also can work with the Secretariat to support the further development of the broader learning process of the Centre. This might include, in particular, supporting the successful establishment and operation of the various issue-focussed temporary activities (including Centre-wide units and working groups) discussed earlier, looking for ways to improve the environment and culture for learning within the Centre, and also seeking ways to enhance the involvement of recipients, other donors and researchers, and relevant Canadian constituencies in the Centre's learning process.

A final point that might be considered is the method of staffing both the Secretariat and OPE. Given the service role to be played and the need to draw on views and expertise throughout IDRC, the credibility and effectiveness of the Secretariat and OPE might be enhanced if their staff were to be drawn from other parts of the Centre. The practice would be for Officers to move into the Secretariat or OPE for a three to five year period, following which they would return to program or other activities. It would be expected that they would return to a more senior position than they had left, and being asked to serve in OPE or the Secretariat would be treated as an indication of exceptional performance and a recognition of the potential of the officer to undertake more senior assignments in the future.

While in the Secretariat or OPE these Officers would need to maintain excellent links throughout the Centre, and provide effective support and follow up to the Centre's decision-making process on a wide range of issues. Afterwards they would bring back to their program or division a better understanding of activities undertaken in other parts of the Centre and in the Centre overall, and of the contributions their particular division or program can make in that context. As well as benefitting the Centre, such an approach to staffing also should provide opportunities for broader experience, personal development and greater satisfaction for the staff who are given such assignments.

IV. Managing Human Resources: Treating People as our Most Important Asset

The sort of decentralized learning process this paper has been describing and advocating clearly is a people-centred process. The intent is to develop the capacities of people, give them greater opportunities to contribute, and to inter-relate their contributions into a learning process which is cumulative and has results which are greater than the sum of its parts.

It is now being recognized within the Centre that a successful learning process, centred on people, requires as one of its essential components a stronger, more professional human resources management system. The Human Resources Division has begun to pursue a broad agenda for improvement in this regard, and is developing the capabilities to better address that agenda. A further indication of this growing concern, is the emphasis placed on human resources management issues in the range of Working Group reports now being considered or implemented within the Centre. Many staff will judge the seriousness and likely success of the renewal efforts of the Centre on the basis of the responses to those Working Groups. Rather than review here the many worthwhile recommendations contained in those reports, the next few pages will suggest a number of broader issues and objectives that will be important in designing the more effective, professional system for managing human resources required by an organization for learning.

- A. Perhaps the first point to be made is that the operation of an organization that really does regard people as its most important asset, requires a strong social contract - a clear understanding of the commitment of the organization to its people and of the commitment those people are willing and expected to provide to the organization. In the case of IDRC, that social contract requires clarification.

In particular, a basic decision needs to be made (and has already been considered in at least a preliminary fashion by management) on whether program staff should expect to spend a full career in IDRC, or whether people should come to IDRC for a period of years and then move on (what might be labelled a "rotational" model). In the original conception, IDRC explicitly adopted the latter approach, with the expectation that after a few

years of work within the Centre, program staff would move back to research or other pursuits. (This has not been an issue with respect to administrative or support staff, although other issues of career and professional development will need to be addressed in clarifying the Centre's social contract with those staff.) In practice over the last fifteen years, however, program staff have stayed for longer periods to the point where many now expect to spend much or even all of their career within IDRC. There is a need for the social contract the Centre has with its staff to make clear whether program staff can expect to make a career within IDRC (and if so, much work will need to be done to improve the management of such a career system) or whether the rotational system is to continue to apply (raising the requirement for improved capacities for search, selection and later outplacement of program staff).

The question, at least in part, is to find the right balance between the need for continuity, experience, ease of working together, and enhanced corporate memory that the career model provides; against the infusion of new ideas and perspectives, closeness to the research environment, and the ability to address problems fresh and see innovative solutions, that the more rotational model provides. While there probably is no single best answer to this question, one that I found particularly attractive in my discussions, was based on the principle that no individual should stay in a particular level and position for more than four or five years. If, toward the end of that period there was no likelihood of promotion (or of assignment to one of the central support units as outlined above) then the individual would be given all possible assistance in moving back to research or to some other area of activity.

The Ford Foundation, which operates a rotational system for its program staff, has developed an array of support measures for staff in finding new employment, and the Centre would need to investigate the possibility of providing similar support to its staff to the degree the rotational model were adopted. In parallel, we would need to examine strengthened means to support Directors and others in conducting searches to identify qualified new candidates to come into the Centre. Program staff who return to research might be eligible after two

or three years for reappointment within the Centre, and perhaps would be given some preferential standing in the staffing process at that time.

For those individuals who are promoted, or selected for central support units or other reassignment within the Centre, or for whom Management makes a specific exception because of their particular contribution to the Centre, the four to five year cycle would begin again. However, before taking on new responsibilities, these individuals should be given a period of time for professional upgrading and refreshment. The Working Group on Training and Development has made some valuable specific recommendations in this regard.

- B. A second broad point, which is also related to the question of social contract, is the need to give more attention to clarifying what sort of career path those who remain within the Centre can anticipate. With respect to program staff, consideration might be given to the creation of a Senior Scientist position at the same level as Associate Director, in order to open up possibilities of promotion for individuals who have an important contribution to make to the Centre and to the process of development in their area of speciality, but who do not wish, or would not be well suited, to move into areas of management responsibility. With respect to administrative and support staff, work should continue to clarify possible career paths, for example, ways in which secretaries might hope to progress into more senior administrative positions or to become program assistants, and options for staff exchanges within and outside the Centre.
- C. Thirdly, given its standing as a Crown corporation and its dependency on Parliament for appropriations, the Centre generally has tracked the pattern of public service remuneration. To the degree, however, that the Centre departs from the public service model of employment (which certainly would be the case if the somewhat more rotational model of employment outlined above, was adopted for program staff), then to that degree some departure from the public service pattern of remuneration would be justified. There is already some precedent for this, for example, in the way in which the Centre provides time off for staff to compensate for time

spent on travel. Again any departures from the public service model would have to be carefully considered and justified. The Centre's overall policy on remuneration, too, is an important part of its social contract with staff.

- D. A fourth area is the importance of selecting and training good managers. As a general rule, those brought into the Centre from outside to fill management positions, already should have a demonstrated record of success in a management role; and better opportunities should be provided for staff within the Centre to develop management skills and to develop as candidates to fill management positions. In addition, opportunities need to be provided to managers within the Centre to upgrade their skills and share experiences. The Human Resources Division is in the process of developing a program to this end, and these efforts should be strongly encouraged. It will be difficult, if not impossible, to have an effective, decentralized learning process unless we have managers sensitive to the requirements of such a process, who actively promote it, and are selected and evaluated in part on that basis. The Human Resources Division has a responsibility to support managers in strengthening those skills.
- E. Fifth, the current review of the system for performance assessment of staff can do much to further the development of a decentralized learning process. It can do this by ensuring that, whatever variant of the various assessment systems being considered is adopted, it reinforces the principle of setting clear objectives, delegating as fully as possible the resources and authority required, and holding individuals to account after the fact for results achieved. To that end as well, it would be helpful to include explicitly in the assessment an appreciation of the contribution made by the individual to the learning process of the Centre--including participation in reviews and evaluations, success in refocussing activities in light of lessons learned, ability to take well-considered risks and innovate to advance the frontiers of Centre activities, contribution to working groups and related issue-focussed activities, participation in seminars and preparation of papers (for program staff), and so on.

- F. Sixth, attention needs to be paid to facilitating the ways in which staff members can access the human resources management system of the Centre. Consideration could be given, for example, to having individuals within the Human Resources Division designated as the point of contact for particular groups or categories of staff. That Human Resources Officer would be responsible for dealing, in the first instance, with any query or complaint raised by a member of the designated category or group. These officers would help ensure that the Human Resources Division continues to build a more supportive, service orientation, and responds quickly to requests from staff and management. Additional measures will need to be considered as well to strengthen the links between Regional Offices and the human resources management system.
- G. Finally, the philosophy which needs to underpin all of these efforts to strengthen the human resources management system is that expenditures on staff are investments in our most important asset. To underline the importance attached to those efforts, the President's Committee might have a regular meeting, perhaps twice a year, to deal with human resources management issues. These meetings would include both personnel policy questions and particular staffing issues (including succession and career planning, identification of individuals showing promise to assume more senior positions, staff exchanges within the Centre including assignments to central support units, and so on). Those discussions would be intended to ensure overall that the Centre has in place, and is operating effectively, the sort of professional human resources management system that a decentralized organization for learning requires.

V. Conclusions

The preceding pages have attempted to present one overall perspective on the process of renewal underway within IDRC, and to suggest some initiatives that might be taken to further that process. The Centre already is well along in renewing itself in a manner that maintains and reinforces its fundamental strengths - including its highly qualified and motivated multi-national staff, its priority on responsiveness to the requirements of developing countries, and its general philosophy of empowering people to use research to find better solutions to the problems they face. The preceding pages have tried to suggest ways to further advance that process by strengthening IDRC as an organization for learning, an organization with enhanced capacity to anticipate, experiment and shift focus as we learn from our activities, and one which thereby is able to deal more effectively with an increasingly turbulent environment. We have suggested that this can be done, in part, by:

- further decentralizing IDRC, following the principle of delegating as much authority as possible to those closest to the action (including recipients), and clarifying the particular contribution or value added that each successive level in a more decentralized organization is expected to provide. The intent is to reduce or remove structural impediments - to create the organizational room for recipients and staff at all levels to take responsibility, to innovate, experiment and learn, thereby developing and tapping a far greater range of their capabilities, and enhancing the repertoire and flexibility of IDRC for dealing with rapid change;
- building an environment and infrastructure for learning, in particular by:
 - . building a shared context and framework of policy and priorities to provide guidance to recipients and staff in exercising their increased authority to take initiatives, and to provide more stable points of reference for dealing with rapidly changing circumstances;
 - . developing and encouraging an action-learning operating style, one that fosters a greater degree

of experimentation and risk taking, and in which the results of those initiatives are evaluated and effectively fed back into the process of planning to create a self-correcting process of learning;

- . developing better mechanisms to focus the learning process across the Centre on specific problems and issues, marshalling talent, resources and creativity; and
 - . providing the necessary infrastructure - staff support, communication links, documentation and other mechanisms - the minimum necessary underpinnings for an effective learning process;
- improving our management of human resources by treating people as our most important asset, clarifying the social contract between the Centre and its staff, and putting in place the professional human resources management system that a decentralized organization for learning requires.

The value of the particular recommendations contained in the preceding pages lies in the extent to which they prove to be useful contributions to the process of renewal already underway in the Centre. My hope is that consideration of this paper within the Centre, and any actions that result, will advance and perhaps help to focus that process. At the least, I hope it will result in a more widely shared understanding of what could be or is being attempted.

To succeed, the continued strengthening of the Centre as an organization for learning, needs to be carried out in a manner that itself is a good example of a learning process in action. The suggestions made in this paper, or some better alternatives suggested by management and staff, need to be experimented with, the results of those experiments followed up and evaluated, and those assessments of lessons learned used to decide on what next steps are appropriate. The Secretariat (and OPE) can provide ongoing support for this exercise and the views and contributions of recipients and staff at all levels should be important in the design, implementation and evaluation of those experiments.

It is of course the Board, management and staff of IDRC who will need to decide whether and what version of the suggestions made in this paper should be adopted or experimented with, and what the method, relative emphasis and timing should be for testing those measures. In addition to experimentation with the suggestions made here and the development of better

alternatives, work needs to be done to elaborate additional ways in which that process of renewal can include administrative and support staff more fully; and also to develop ways to extend the IDRC learning process more effectively to encompass other donors (including CIDA), relevant Canadian constituencies and the broader research community.

One approach, for example, might be for the President's Committee, after discussion with the Management Group and perhaps others in the Centre, to determine which of the suggestions made in this paper should be proceeded with (implemented or recommended to the Board), at least on an experimental basis. For the rest, a working group* might be established which would take the remaining suggestions as one point of departure, consult widely within the Centre and to a degree outside, and make recommendations on what version of those suggestions, or what alternative or additional measures, would best advance the evolution of IDRC as an organization for learning. That working group could have a mandate as well to include in its considerations the development of additional measures to advance the renewal process as it affects administrative and support staff, as well as steps to enhance the involvement of other donors, relevant Canadian constituencies and the wider research community in the learning process of IDRC. In this latter regard, in particular, it would need to work closely with whatever mechanism is set up to plan the celebrations of the 20th Anniversary of IDRC.

If IDRC is to be at the cutting edge of research for development, it will be essential to improve our ability to identify emerging issues, take risks and experiment with possible responses, and to learn from the results of the initiatives we undertake or support. Parliament created IDRC with a substantial degree of independence in order that there would be greater scope (then would exist within a public service bureaucracy) to undertake that process of exploration and innovation. The process of renewal in which we are now engaged, the process of renewing IDRC as an organization for learning, will do much to determine the Centre's capacity to continue to fulfill its mission in a more turbulent world.

*or possibly three working groups - one on decentralization, another on the learning environment and a third on the human resources management system. In either case, it might be advisable for the working group(s) to be chaired by the appropriate Centre Officer or Officers.